



**Written Testimony of Nancy W. Gentes, Executive Director  
Madonna Place, Inc.  
240 Main Street  
Norwich, CT 06360**

**Prepared for the Appropriations Committee  
Public Hearing – February 26, 2015  
Public Hearing on the Governor's Proposed Budget**

My testimony is in opposition to the complete elimination of funding for State of Connecticut, Fatherhood Initiative Programming from the DSS budget, the DCF budget ("low priority "contracts) and from the Office of Early Childhood Family Empowerment Program

Background: Why has the State invested in Fatherhood Programs? *The ultimate goal is to improve the lives of children and families in our community.* Family structures have changed over time, with less families living in traditional, nuclear families, regardless of income. The number of low-income non-residential (custodial) fathers has increased, particularly among minority groups. The role of fathers as more than financial providers has been given significant recognition. Research has clearly demonstrated that children do better when fathers are positively involved in their lives; and conversely that their absence can lead to negative consequences. Fatherhood Programs are effective in connecting fathers to their children, preferably early in life and in breaking down barriers which prevent them from being fully involved and responsible fathers. These barriers that fathers present with include a history of incarceration, unemployment or underemployment, history of substance abuse, domestic violence, or mental illness, a poor relationship with the mother of their child (children), involvement with the Department of Children and Families, lack of housing, lack of reliable transportation, and a lack of basic needs resources.

**Madonna Place** has been part of the State Fatherhood Initiative since the inception of the legislation in 1999 and is one of six funded State certified sites that currently

provides comprehensive services to fathers and other men who are significant in the lives of young children.

**Impact:** Fathers who participate in our programs are becoming and staying employed, paying child support, increasing their parenting skills and the amount of positive time they spend with their children. Children and families are better off. With the three funding sources, over 250 fathers each year receive services, and positive impact has been consistently achieved.

**Specific funding:**

The DSS funding (94, 442) per site is for intensive case management and group parenting services of low-income fathers and father figures. Office of Early Childhood – Children’s Trust Fund: Family Empowerment Program also supports the same services, but the emphasis is on prevention and younger fathers. 42,642 of this funding is for Madonna Place and allows for additional fathers to be served.

The DCF funding 48,200 to Madonna Place, Region 3 – is for DCF involved fathers – case management and group parenting program- Middletown and Northeastern Connecticut. (Windham County)

A special focus is placed on serving low-moderate income fathers who have barriers which prevent them from being fully involved and responsible fathers. These barriers include unemployment or underemployment, history of substance abuse, domestic violence, or mental illness, a poor relationship with the mother of their child (children), involvement with the Department of Children and Families, lack of housing, lack of reliable transportation, and lack of basic needs resources. Additionally we have resources (currently funded through the CTF -Family Empowerment and at also at risk, for elimination) which allow us to focus on prevention efforts, i.e. – first time fathers, single fathers, fathers who are “at-risk, expectant fathers, have infants, etc. This focus is especially aligned with our agency’s philosophy of directing resources

towards prevention and early intervention, and is viewed as a more effective way to assist fathers, rather than waiting until they are “broken” and significant damage may have occurred to their relationship with their children.

Connecticut has been a leader in the country for Fatherhood work thanks to the leadership started by John Martinez and Patricia Wilson Coker and supported by this legislature. I appreciate your continued support and consideration of this request to restore State Funding (3 sources) to Fatherhood.